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Vasant Saberwal  
*Yale University*

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# The Politicization of Gaddi Access to Grazing Resources in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, 1960 to 1994

Vasant Saberwal

Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

## Introduction

This paper is about a goat- and sheep-herding community in the state of Himachal Pradesh, in the Indian Himalaya. The Gaddi community has been subject over the past century to an official rhetoric that sees their grazing practices as responsible for large scale land degradation. As a result there has been a sustained effort to restrict Gaddi access to the forests and grasslands they have traditionally grazed. However, despite this opposition the Gaddi have continued to herd, and in fact are among the most prosperous land-based communities in the upper Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh (Bormann 1980, Phillimore 1982).

This prosperity is surprising given that pastoralist societies worldwide have become increasingly marginalized over the past several decades. This impoverishment has generally resulted from state policies that have decried herding as a primitive, unproductive and ultimately degrading use of the land. While a number of cultural influences and political agendas have contributed to this image of the lazy, non-productive herder (Bhattacharya 1984), the end product has been the formulation of policies aimed at settling herders and restricting herder access to areas they have traditionally grazed. Because herders have generally inhabited social and geographic spaces at some distance from the centers of power, they have been unable to influence the process of such policy formulations. Richard Hogg (1986) describes the emergence of a "New Pastoralism" in Africa, one based on a large number of extremely poor herd owners with very few animals and a few, often absentee, urban-based herders who own the majority of animals.

This paper is an analysis of how the Gaddi have managed to continue herding in an ostensibly hostile bureaucratic environment.

## Background: Gaddi, Pastoral Cycle and Terms of Access

The agropastoralist Gaddi number approximately 100,000 people in Kangra district. The Gaddi pastoral cycle is based on the seasonal exploitation of vegetation resources over a large geographic area. They spend four months of the summer grazing the highly nutritious forage of the alpine meadows of the high Himalayan (including the Great Himalayan, Pir Panjal and Dhauladhar) ranges in summer, and then spend four months grazing the post-monsoonal flush of vegetation in the low lying Siwalik foothills in the winter (see Fig. 1). They take up to two months each on the autumn and spring migrations, which may cover over 250 km in length.

While there are other herders who practice a similar form of animal husbandry in the districts of Chamba, Kulu, and Kinnaur, I will not deal with them in this paper, although it is likely that similar processes to the ones I describe here are operative in each of these other regions.

## Pre-colonial Period - the Encouragement to Grazing

Current Gaddi access to grazing resources can be traced to a system of grazing rights that was established over 150 years ago. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, all land, including the vast areas under forest, belonged to the *rajas* or kings of small princely states. Historian Chetan Singh suggests that since Himachal's timber had not yet become a commercial commodity, the king actively encouraged Gaddi grazing since it provided him with revenue from lands that were of no value by themselves. The *raja* gave herders rights to graze specific tracts of forest lands, called *bans* in the winter grazing grounds and *dhars* in the summer grazing grounds. The herder was required to pay a rent for use of the grazing lands. Each of these tracts of land could accommodate 1000-1200

animals, and since most herding families had around 300-400 animals each, herders with grazing rights would invite other herders to graze their animals with his own. Parts of the system survive to this day.

### **The Colonial Period - Foundations of Grazing Restrictions**

The British annexation of the Punjab in 1849 coincided with a growing demand for timber. The earliest attempts to restrict Gaddi access to forests took place in the context of fears that Gaddi grazing would prevent regeneration within the forest reserves carved out by the Forest Department(FD).<sup>1</sup> Over time a series of regulations were imposed on the Gaddi by the British: three annual taxes were imposed on the Gaddi; herders were expected to stick to fixed migratory routes defined by the FD, and travel a minimum of five kilometers a day on migration to ensure grazing grounds were not overgrazed; individual Gaddi were expected to graze the specific *bans* they had been assigned to graze under the earlier system established by the *rajas*; a system of dual taxation was imposed in an attempt to discourage goat grazing, seen to be far more harmful than sheep grazing (Tucker 1985). Over time, Gaddi grazing rights within forest reserves were gradually diminished.

### **Post-Colonial Period: The Bureaucracy versus the Politicians**

Following independence there has been a consistent attempt by the FD to enforce many of the regulations put in place by the British. On the whole, however, the FD has failed to achieve these objectives. The Gaddi continue to obtain forage by entering social and financial arrangements that the FD opposes. I shall argue in this section, following a description of these arrangements, that the Gaddi use political influence to enable their continued use of social networks to access forage they require, as well as more generally to undermine the restrictive policies of the FD.

### **The Gaddi's Social and Economic Arrangements Entered**

Today, the Gaddi enter into a variety of arrangements to obtain the forage they require. I shall highlight two of them: herders lacking forage commonly adjust with herders who have a surplus of forage; and herders are increasingly buying winter grazing in the neighboring states of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

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<sup>1</sup> The Himachal Forest Department is officially called the Himachal Pradesh Department for Forest Farming and Conservation. For the sake of simplicity I shall use the term Forest Department or Himachal Forest Department for the remainder of this article.

Herders who lack access to specific grazing lands "adjust" with those herders who do have such access. An "adjustor" may accommodate an "adjustee", as it were, for rent in the form of cash payment, manure, labor or reciprocal sharing of summer and winter grazing resources.

As a result of such "adjustment", animals belonging to four to five persons are actually herded as a single herd. Indeed, one rarely comes across a herd comprised of animals belonging to a single herder. There is a number of incentives to combine herds in this manner, both for the "owner" and for the "renter". The renter, of course, obtains access to a scarce resource, forage. The "owner" on the other hand, obtains access, most commonly, to another scarce resource, labor. During the summer months, when labor requirements are low, a renter may take over the owner's herding duties entirely, thereby freeing him to invest his time in other ventures. In the winter the "owner" gains access to essential labor, and so is relieved of the necessity of hiring additional labor, or using additional family members, such as his children, who might otherwise be gaining a useful education.

The other option for herders seeking winter forage is to move outside Himachal Pradesh, into the neighboring states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. I shall limit my discussion to the Punjab since a number of my informants used the Punjab option to graze their animals. Gaddi wintering in Punjab is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to my informants such resource use was uncommon as recently as two decades ago, and that the move to Punjab was necessitated by the accelerating loss of grazing lands in Himachal Pradesh. By all accounts herding goats and sheep in Punjab is an expensive proposition. Herders graze village commons and not areas that are under the control of the Punjab Forest Department. As a result, all negotiations regarding grazing take place between the herder and the village Panchayat (the council of elders). Among the herders there is broad agreement regarding the high costs associated with such an arrangement. The herders who graze in the Punjab are among the wealthier herders in the two villages in which I worked.

Herders lacking formal rights to grazing resources have necessarily entered a variety of social arrangements to access the grazing resources they need. Moreover, herders move between arrangements depending on the nature of their requirements. Ram Kumar of village Udaipur<sup>2</sup> is an example of such mobility. In the early 1970s he started out as a servant, herding for one of the largest herd owners in Udaipur spending the winter in Bilaspur district. Over a five year period he built up his herd to over 100 animals at which point he moved into

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<sup>2</sup> Names of all Gaddi herders and villages have been changed.

the Bradighat area of Solan district, adjusting with another large herd owner of Udaipur. He now has over 500 animals, and is one of the largest herd owners in the village. Rather than adjust with someone, a difficult proposition considering the size of his herd, Ram Kumar now herds in Punjab, paying a village Panchayat a large amount to ensure he has annual access to the village's common grazing grounds.

There is thus considerable flexibility in how individual Gaddi access grazing resources. Officials of the Himachal Forest Department (HFD) are aware of these arrangements, and have attempted to prevent herders from accommodating one another; such multiple accommodation results in a far higher stocking intensity in a particular area than if only the right holders' animals were to graze the area. That the HFD has largely failed in reducing this mobility of the Gaddi, is due, I shall now argue, to the political influence wielded by the Gaddi.

### **Gaddi Use of Political Influence**

I shall use two sets of documents to demonstrate that the Gaddi use politicians to undermine the functioning of the FD bureaucracy: first I will compare the recommendations made by the two reports that have considered the grazing problem in Himachal Pradesh since independence. These reports were written by Parmar (1959), a forest officer, and the Grazing Advisory Committee (GAC 1972), comprised mainly of elected politicians, and I shall attempt to demonstrate that the GAC recommendations reflect political rather than ecological concerns. The GAC report is now considered to be the official grazing policy document of the HFD. Second, I shall use official correspondence between foresters and politicians to demonstrate how politicians interfere in departmental functioning in support of the Gaddi.

### **Parmar (1959) vs GAC (1972)**

To start with the comparison between the Parmar and the GAC reports:

The Parmar report reiterates many of the restrictions that the British attempted to enforce on the Gaddi - a reduction in Gaddi access to grazing lands, the imposition of a crushingly high rate of taxation, a ban on Gaddi herders accommodating one another at times of individual forage shortage, requiring herders to move at least five kms a day while on migration, and so on. In contrast, the GAC report calls for an initial moratorium on the implementation of any restrictions for a period of five years; it calls for an opening of forest reserves to Gaddi grazing, including reserves that had been closed to grazing for over a hundred years; and a call for a nominal increase in taxes levied on goats.

The two reports also differ in their treatment of the Gaddi and the buffalo herding Gujar community. While Parmar does not differentiate between the need to

impose measures that would restrict both Gaddi and Gujar access to Himachal's forests, the GAC report comes down heavily on the side of the Gaddi, going so far as to suggest that the Gujar be completely eliminated from free and open grazing within Himachal's forests.

What is interesting about the differences in the two reports is that the GAC report quotes verbatim from the introductory sections in the Parmar report, regarding both the deplorable condition of Himachal's forests and the fact that Gaddi and Gujar grazing practices are responsible for the degradation. Yet while making the recommendations the GAC report tones down many of Parmar's recommendations for the Gaddi, and exaggerates Parmar's recommendations for the Gujar. At no point does the GAC report provide any evidence to support its claim that buffalo grazing has a more damaging impact on the forest than goat or sheep grazing.

This unsubstantiated hostility toward grazing practices of the Gujar community suggests that the interference in favor of the Gaddi was motivated by political considerations. The Himachal Gujar community is too small to figure significantly in the state's electoral politics; the Gaddi, on the other hand, constitute large parts of the population in half the state's districts, including Kinnaur, Kullu, Lahaul and Spiti, Kangra and Chamba. In recent elections the BJP, currently the opposition party in the state, has supported Gaddi candidates in the Legislative elections from both Bajnath and Dharmsala constituencies.

### **Correspondence Between Politicians and Forest Officials**

The other source indicating political intervention on behalf of the Gaddi is the departmental files that I was given access to. Within these files there are repeated notes from politicians, requesting various HFD officials to accommodate, or accord a sympathetic hearing, to a particular herder. This intervention appears motivated by hopes of electoral gains. Herders tend to seek assistance from politicians elected from the herders' electoral constituency - likewise, politicians' notes appended to herder applications clearly follow constituency divisions. There are almost no herder applications that have come in directly to the FD. On the other hand, every other page in six bulky files is in reference to a herder application that had been submitted to a minister's office and subsequently forwarded to the CF's office for action. Occasionally, a Divisional Forest Officer<sup>3</sup> has refused to bow to pressure and

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<sup>3</sup> The HFD divides Himachal into eight forest circles, each managed by a Conservator of Forests (CF). Each circle is divided into 4-5 divisions, each managed by a Divisional Forest Officer (DFO).

accommodate a herder as requested by a politician; more often, such herders have been accommodated.

The most dramatic evidence of the effectiveness of political intervention comes from the opening of State forests -- both Demarcated Protected (DPFs) and RFs -- to Gaddi grazing for the first time in over a hundred years. The suggestion to open these areas was first made by the GAC report in 1971, specifically with regard to the RFs of Sirmour District. The GAC had pointed to Gaddi grazing in Chamba's RFs to support the position that more forests should be opened in Sirmour district. At the time the Chief Conservation Forester responded by commenting that the fact that herders were allowed to graze RFs in Chamba district, and that using Chamba as precedent for opening other RFs would simply compound the mistake.<sup>4</sup> The HFD successfully resisted herder demands on this occasion.

However, by the late seventies, 10,000 sheep and goats had to be accommodated within Sirmour because the neighboring Uttar Pradesh government refused to allow them to continue herding in the Dehra Dun division as they had in the past. The herders were accommodated in 1979, despite vocal protests from the DFOs of the various divisions of Nahan Circle. The next year herders of Solan Division cited Sirmour as precedence and began demanding that the DPFs and RFs in their divisions be opened to grazing. By 1983, a number of herders in Dharampur range, Solan division, had been provided additional grazing lands within the state DPFs, contrary to the recommendation by the DFO, Solan.

By 1985 the Solan herders were demanding that they be provided access to the RFs of the region. Asked to comment on the matter, DFO Solan protested strongly, saying that DPFs had been opened to grazing despite his opposition, and that the Gaddi had ample grazing areas, and did not need additional RFs to be opened.

Subsequently, the DFO Solan received an application from the herders, addressed to the Forest Minister, who appended his "orders" to the application, "... the grazier cases in Solan division be treated on the analogy of Sirmour." In other words, if the RFs of Sirmour were opened to graziers, the same should be done in Solan, even though in the former case an additional 10,000 animals ousted from UP had to be accommodated in those forests. The DFO responded by saying the state would not be able to meet the target of bringing 50% of the geographical area of the Pradesh under forests by the turn of the century, if graziers were given access to RFs, and that therefore, there should be no further allotment of forest areas to migratory graziers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> March 19, 1974, file #1, CFs office, Nahan.

<sup>5</sup> June 30, 1985, file #4, CFs office Nahan.

In response to the strongly worded recommendations of his DFOs, CF Nahan recommends to the CCF that it would be inadvisable to open the RFs in his circle to Gaddi grazing. By 1991, however, the RFs of Solan had been opened to grazing. Clearly, the Gaddi derive tangible benefits from the political influence they wield.

## Conclusion

Political influence has served Gaddi interests well. My discussions with Gaddi herders as well as officials of the HFD suggest that very few, if any, regulations are in force today. Census figures do not indicate a decrease in the numbers of goats and sheep grazed by the Gaddi, the two primary objectives of the taxation policy of the HFD. Current grazing fees are pegged at levels similar to the early 20th century. In effect this indicates a *decrease* in grazing dues when one takes into account inflationary pressures that have raised goat and sheep prices from less than 20 rupees an animal at the time to current figures of over 800 rupees an animal. More than one Gaddi invariably grazes in locations to which only a single herder has the right to graze, thereby negating any effort of the HFD to restrict the numbers of animals grazing an area. And while the Gaddi complain about the regulations compelling them to travel at least 5 km between camping spots, in my own experience, they move as and when they feel forage becomes a limiting factor. Simultaneously, political intervention on behalf of individual herders has increased the extent of grazing lands available to them, thereby balancing to some extent the loss of grazing lands to other competing interests.<sup>6</sup>

From the foregoing, however, one should not conclude that all is well with Gaddi herding. As briefly referred to earlier in the paper, the Gaddi have lost access to some grazing grounds which have been put under alternate forms of land use. The difficulties of obtaining forage are serious enough that many herders have moved out of the herding business, despite its lucrative nature.

There are labor and/or monetary costs associated with any kind of social arrangements a "non ban-owning" herder enters. For example, grazing in the Punjab involves the outlay of a considerable amount of money. Conversely, both labor and monetary costs decrease for a ban-owning herder who accommodates a "non ban-owner". In this fashion property, labor and wealth form a trinity, some combination of which may determine who stays on in herding and who is forced out. Similar factors have determined who continues to herd, and in what capacity, among east African herders (Hogg 1986, Little 1992, Shipton and Goheen 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have demonstrated that there is very little historical evidence to support the FD's position that Gaddi grazing leads to large scale degradation (Saberwal n.d.). Discussing this further is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

And as in Africa, the Gaddi could be heading toward a more stratified society, characterized by a few herders with very large herds and a large number of herders with very few animals.

Finally the Gaddi case has critical implications for the implementation of conservation policies in Himachal Pradesh. Current conservation measures adopted by the HFD in the form of enforced, unpopular restrictions and regulations are unlikely to serve conservation interests of the region. As things stand at the moment, herders appear to bypass the FD in their efforts to access grazing resources. A more inclusive approach by the HFD, involving herder participation in decision making on the restrictions that should be imposed on the Gaddi may result in more effective forest management.

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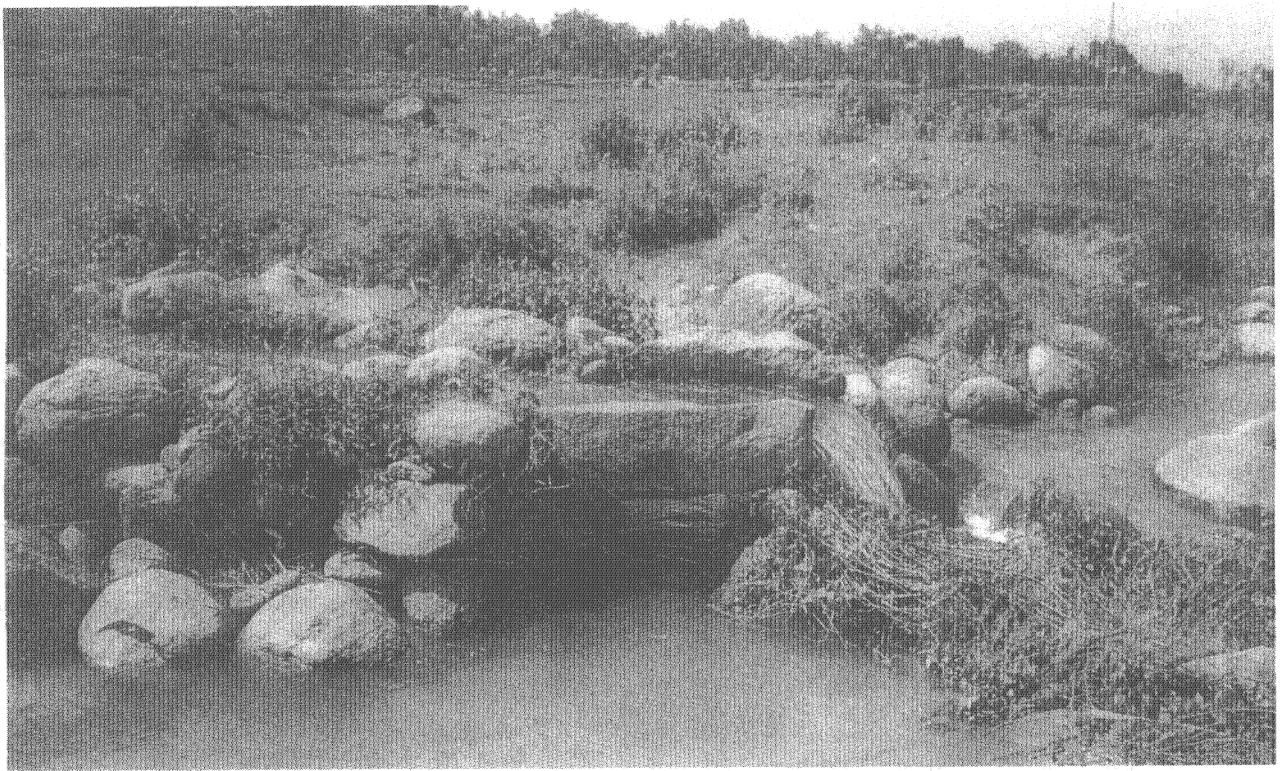
### List of Abbreviations

CF Conservator of Forests  
CCF Chief Conservator of Forests  
DFO Divisional Forest Officer  
FD Forest Department  
GAC Grazing Advisory Committee  
HFD Himachal Forest Department

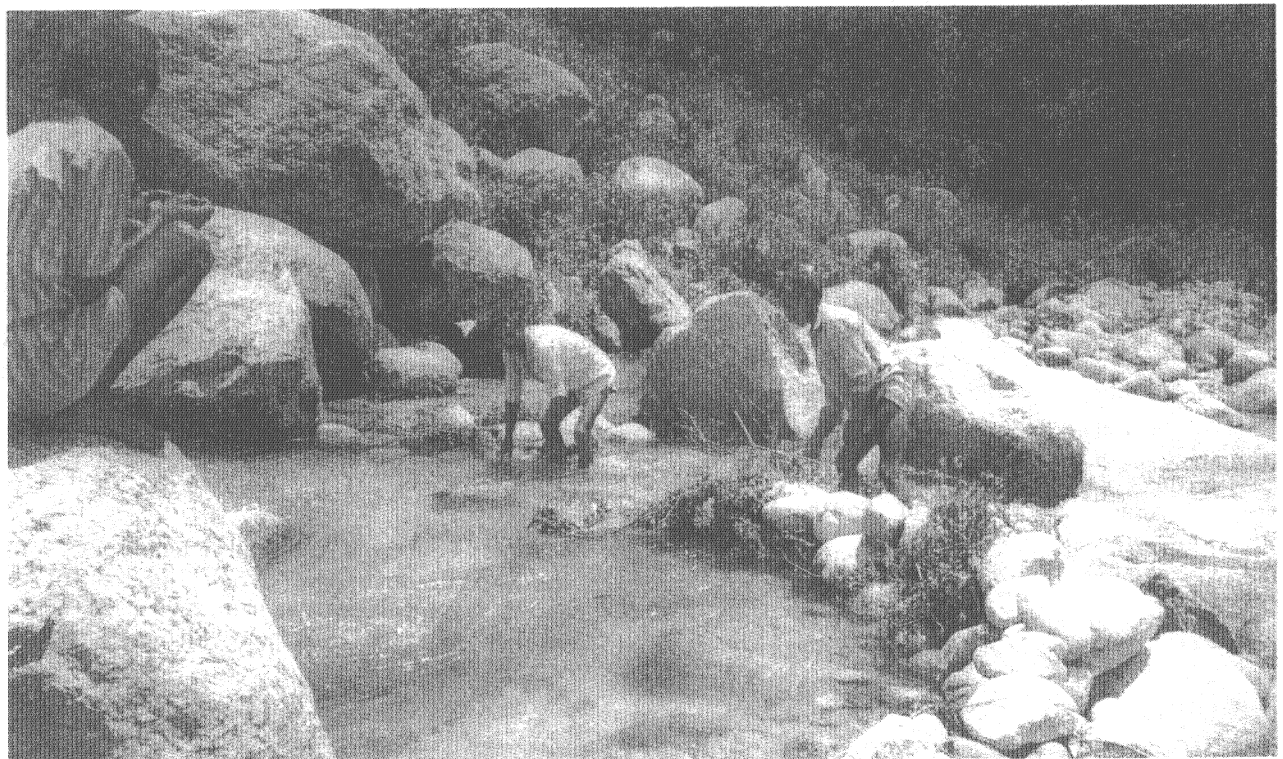
Paper presented at the 24th Annual South Asia Meetings, University of Wisconsin, Madison, October 1995. This work is part of a larger study on the co-evolution of Gaddi grazing practices and the grazing policy of the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department over the past century and a half.

Vasant Saberwal is presently a fellow of the Pacific Basin Research Center of Soka University of America. He is currently engaged in research at the Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard University.





Intersecting kuhl channels      *Photograph By Mark Bai*



Repairs to a diversion dam, sabotaged by downstream farmers      *Photograph By Mark Bai*